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Ideological Disagreement in the 2014 European Election Self-Placement and Party Positioning According to Romanian Candidates

SERGIU GHERGHINA

INTRODUCTION

In politics few notions are as popular as the idea of a division between the left and the right. The concept emerged at the end of the 18th century when political life in France meant the dichotomy between supporters of the revolution and supporters of the king. Over time, political parties developed these initial differences into complex views over government. The contrast between protectionist state and laissez-faire policies or between social-liberal and conservative values were greatly nuanced to accommodate the existence of more competitors in multi-party systems. Also, while in the beginning these views were limited to national states, in contemporary times they include also international or supranational politics, e.g. in Europe there are issues related to European Union (EU). These evolutions are associated to several ideologies (and policies on the implementation side) that allowed electoral competitors to distinguish themselves, mainly for voters, on the political space¹. It is precisely this diversity that raises interpretation problems regarding the meaning of the left-right divide. Many scholars referred to the danger of oversimplification of reality when dealing with analytical concepts based on this division². Others tried to conceptualize the left-right axis by suggesting that the core meaning of the distinction is the extent to which one supports or rejects egalitarian social

¹ Two of the most influential studies with focus on ideologies and mapping along left-right axis are Klaus von Beyme, *Political Parties in Western Democracies*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1985; Alan Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996.

² See, for example, Roger Eatwell, "The Nature of the Right. Is There an 'Essentialist' Philosophical Core", in Roger Eatwell, Noel O'Sullivan (eds.), *The Nature of the Right: European and American Politics and Political Thought since 1789*, Pinter, London, 1989, pp. 47-60 or Ian Budge, Ivor Crewe, Dennis Farlie (eds.), *Party Identification and Beyond: Representations of Voting and Party Competition*, ECPR Press, Colchester, 2010.

change³. And others argued in favor of a multi-dimensional political space in which left and right can acquire or change meaning⁴.

In spite of conceptual difficulties and practical challenges, the left-right axis remained deeply entrenched in political discourse. Candidates, political parties and voters use it frequently in elections to express policy preferences, argue for a position, or justify their way of action. So far, the political science literature has focused extensively on party positions and voters' alignment or self-placement as a response to the supply side⁵. Less attention has been paid to the self-placement of candidates in relation to that of their parties. Such an issue is relevant especially because contemporary political parties act in many cases as unitary actors but intra-party divisions are increasingly visible⁶. This article seeks to partly fill this void in the literature and analyzes the ideological agreement between subjective positioning of Romanian candidates and political parties on the left-right axis in the most recent European election. In addition to this general comparison, it tries to identify whether party affiliation (left vs. right), age of the candidates, position on the list and experience in the party make a difference in the different placement. These indicators were selected to check the extent to which congruence is related to candidate profile or to broader systemic elements. The choice of this type of election was not random: following the 2008 change of the electoral system for the national legislative elections⁷, European elections are the only ones organized in Romania where voting takes place on closed-list proportional representation. The latter, as earlier research has shown, is party centered and thus enhances connections between candidates and political parties. Consequently, these are the elections in which we would expect convergence between candidates and party

³ Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989.

⁴ Kenneth Benoit, Michael Laver, *Party Policy in Modern Democracies*, Routledge, London, 2006; Kenneth Benoit, Michael Laver, "The Dimensionality of Political Space: Epistemological and Methodological Considerations", *European Union Politics*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2012, pp. 194-218.

⁵ One of the first attempt to illustrate the complexity of voter self-placement was Samuel H. Barnes et al., *Political Action. Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, Sage, Beverly Hills, 1979.

⁶ Shaun Bowler, David Farrell, Richard Katz (eds.), *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Government*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1999; Michael Laver, "Divided Parties, Divided Government", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1999, pp. 5-29; Daniela Giannetti, Kenneth Benoit (eds.), *Intra-Party Politics and Coalition Governments*, Routledge, London, 2008; John Carey, *Legislative Voting and Accountability*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009.

⁷ Mihail Chiru, Ionuț Ciobanu, "Legislative Recruitment and Electoral System Change: The Case of Romania", *CEU Political Science Journal*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2009, pp. 192-231; Sergiu Gherghina, George Jiglău, "Where Does the Mechanism Collapse? Understanding the 2008 Romanian Electoral System", *Representation*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2012, pp. 445-459.

placement, on the one hand, and high level of attention paid by candidates to the political stances of their parties. It is the least likely case for differences. Romania is an ideal setting to test the existence of ideological congruence since its party politics is characterized by cartelization, government coalitions include a variety of actors, and the ideological polarization is limited⁸. This exploratory study uses data from a candidate survey conducted during the electoral campaign in April-May 2014.

The first section summarizes the recent developments in Romanian politics (period 2009-2014) with an emphasis on the left-right positioning of the main political actors. It includes also a brief presentation of the parliamentary political parties and a short description of the newly emerged parties that competed in the 2014 European election. Next, I provide details about the data used for analysis (candidate survey), variables included in this study and their measurement, and methodology. The third section presents the empirical findings with emphasis on differences between candidate self-placement and their subjective positioning on their parties on the left-right axis. The conclusions wrap-up the discussion about ideological disagreement and indicate potential directions for further research.

LEFT AND RIGHT IN ROMANIAN POLITICS

Media and political scientists have equally considered the recent European elections in Romania as a practice for the presidential elections at the end of the year⁹. The predominance of national issues in the electoral campaign for these elections is additional empirical evidence in favor of such an argument. For example, many political competitors did not have a manifesto with policy ideas and views on European issues. The absence of a manifesto determined quite heterogeneous discourses from candidates of those parties focusing on a broad array of issues from economic hardships and poverty to corruption and dysfunctional state apparatus; all these were mostly about national level. Among the political parties that presented a manifesto, few were those that focused on European issues, e.g. National Liberal Party (PNL), People's Movement Party (PMP). The experience of their candidates as Members of the European Parliament (MEP) appeared to be helpful in shaping a

⁸ Sergiu Gherghina, "Rewarding the 'Traitors'? Legislative Defection and Re-Election in Romania", *Party Politics*, online first 2014.

⁹ For two examples, see the forum dedicated to European elections on pp. 4-5 in the *Timpu*, vol. 24, no. 182, 24 May 2014, and Sorina Soare, "Romania: A Preview of the 2014 Presidential Elections?," in Lorenzo De Sio, Vincenzo Emanuele, Nicola Maggini(eds.), *The European Parliament Elections of 2014*, CISE, Roma, 2014, pp. 235-242.

document dealing with issues on the European agenda. In light of these observations the May 2014 elections have to be seen in the context of evolutions from the domestic political arena. This section focuses on the developments since 2009 because that was when the previous European and presidential elections took place and around that time a discourse about left and right became prominent in Romanian politics. The first sub-section presents the most important political parties, their general positioning, and changes on the left-right axis during the entire post-communist period.

The Parliamentary Political Parties

The 2009 European elections were the first in which Romanian voters elected their representatives in the European Parliament (EP) for a full term in office. They were organized in the context of a grand coalition government that brought together after almost two decades the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL). Their origins suggest that they are both successor parties of the communist party from the previous regime¹⁰. They emerged after a split in the National Salvation Front (FSN), the umbrella organization winning the first post-communist elections in Romania. In 1992, following an internal divergence of opinions, the faction led by Petre Roman, recently dismissed from the prime-minister position at that time, won the internal elections against the ideological faction belonging to country president Ion Iliescu. Roman's party continued for one more year with the label FSN and later became the Democrat Party (and later PDL). The losing side of the internal elections formed the Democratic National Salvation Front that was called Party or Social Democracy in Romania (between 1993 and 2001) and PSD (since 2001).

The PSD is the largest Romanian party with an average electoral support higher than 30%. It won the popular vote in five out of the six legislative elections since its creation and participated in four coalition governments (three times as leading party). Following the split in 1992, the PSD retained most of party elites and local branches of the FSN and thus ended up with a relevant organizational heritage similar to that of the other successor parties in the region¹¹. The PSD kept its identity as successor party and positioned itself to the left of the political space with emphasis on heavy protectionist state, social-egalitarian policies and national oriented discourse. Its dominance on the left was

¹⁰ Grigore Pop-Eleches, "Separated at Birth or Separated by Birth? The Communist Successor Parties in Romania and Hungary," *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1999, pp. 117-147.

¹¹ John T. Ishiyama, "The Communist Successor Parties and Party Organizational Development in Post-Communist Politics", *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 1, 1999, pp. 87-112.

strengthened after the merger with the center left Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSDR) in 2001 – this coincided with the name change from PDSR to PSD – a party with historical roots in the pre-communist period. This allowed the PSD to present itself as a political party with social-democratic roots back in the 19th century¹². In addition, the merger facilitated the PSD access to the International Socialist and to the Party of European Socialists. The clear positioning to the left did not impede the PSD to closely cooperate with the Conservative Party (PC, formerly known as the Romanian Humanist Party, PUR) and to form electoral or political alliances on a regular basis since 2000. This decision was mainly triggered by the media outlets owned by the PC founder Dan Voiculescu: the alliance granted the PSD free access to these outlets. In 2008, following the national legislative election, the PSD joined the PDL in forming a grand coalition government (more than 70% of seats in Parliament) that lasted less than a year. The PSD left the government and proposed its own candidate to the 2009 presidential election. In 2011, the PSD forms together with the PNL and the PC a large political alliance (Social Democratic Union, USL) that comfortably won the 2012 legislative election.

The PDL became, in the early 2000s the second largest party in post-communist Romania. After the 1992 separation from the PSD, the party adopted the name Democratic Party (PD) in 1993. Also situated at the left, the party was somewhat closer to the center than the PSD with moderate state intervention and social protection measures. It ran in an electoral alliance with the PSDR in the 1996 election and got coopted in the center-right coalition government for the 1996-2000 term in office. The PD separated from the PSDR (that later merged with the PSD) and, due to the negative perceptions of its performance in government, obtained poor electoral results in the 2000 election. The change of leader in 2001 set the party on an ascending slope in terms of electoral support and its new leader, won the 2004 presidential elections. Following this success the party decided to shift from center-left ideology to center-right, a declarative shift that would allow the party to differentiate itself from the PSD. Another indicator of the ideological re-positioning of the party was the merger with the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD), a splinter from the PNL, immediately after the 2007 European election; this merger meant the relabeling of the party from PD into PDL. Moreover, the PDL left the Socialist International and joined the European People's Party in the European Parliament. As a result of these changes, the PD advertised itself as a representative of the right side of the political spectrum since the 2008 legislative election.

¹² The history section on the PSD website starts with the origins of social-democracy in the 19th century, drawing a line of direct succession until the contemporary PSD. For details, see <http://www.psd.ro/despre/cine-suntem/istorie/>, last accessed on 11 July 2014.

The PNL, third largest party in the Romanian Parliament, is a center-right party that combines a minimal state intervention, emphasis on entrepreneurs and social liberal values. Although its history was marked by a large number of splits and mergers¹³, there was no relevant ideological shift. This happened also because most splits and mergers involve actors that left and returned to the PNL. For example, internal factions of PNL that left the party (PNL Câmpeanu) made further alliances and returned to the PNL a few years later or in a different format. Three mergers with political parties situated at the center-right of the political axis (in 1998 with the Party of Civic Alliance. In 2001 with the Party Alternative for Romania and in 2004 with the Union of Right Forces) indicate the PNL's willingness to gather around them all the forces that might counter-balance the social-democratic domination in the country. The PNL was part of the center-right electoral alliance winning the 1996 elections and was three times part of the coalition government. During 2007-2008, liberals led a minority government (supported by the PSD on the basis of a "silent agreement").

Next to these three political parties, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) had a constant presence in Parliament. With an ethnic focus, the UDMR can hardly be positioned on the left-right axis because it combines different policies. Its aim is to represent the interests of the Hungarian minority and that is one reason for which its policies are quite flexible. This ideological flexibility makes the party a valuable coalition partner for each of the three parties presented before; it was in many government coalitions between 1992 and 2014. Another party that is difficult to position on a left-right axis is the populist People's Party Dan Diaconescu (PPDD), created in 2011 and third in the 2012 legislative election. On ideological grounds, the party is a combination of right conservatism and radical nationalism with left statements referring to the role played by the state and extensive social protection. In this context, while some elements bring it closer to being radical right, there are several other issues that counter-balance this perspective. The radical right Greater Romania Party (PRM) was created before the 1992 elections and gained seats in the legislature on a regular basis until 2008. It was for a short period part of the 1992-1996 parliamentary majority and reached its peak in the 2000 elections when got second in the legislative elections with almost 20% of votes. It is clearly positioned at the right extreme of the political space.

These brief descriptions of the Romanian political parties that gained access to Parliament – and also competed in the 2014 European election – indicate a diversity of positions on the left-right axis. For two decades, the PSD occupies the left side of the spectrum, while the right side is divided between several competitors: PNL, PDL, and PNȚCD. To these we may add the position

¹³ Sergiu Gherghina, *Party Organization and Electoral Volatility in Central and Eastern Europe: Enhancing Voter Loyalty*, Routledge, London, 2014.

of the PMP, a splinter from the PDL, which also adopted a center-right ideology in its program. Furthermore, there are parties with appeal to particular segments of society (UDMR to ethnics and PRM to extremist voters) and parties with a diffuse appeal (PPDD). Let us now turn to the political dynamic in the most recent five years.

Left and Right since 2009

Since 2009, the Romanian political arena has been quite active in terms of party formation and the creation of political or electoral alliances. Two contrasting tendencies could be observed in this time interval. On the one hand, there were attempts to mobilize segments of the electorate by bringing together political parties with similar or different ideological profile. On the other hand; all these alliances collapsed and new parties emerged, thus leading to a higher fragmentation of competition. The formation of political and electoral alliances is slightly more complicated. Following the departure from government and the dramatic loss of presidential election – both in 2009 – the PSD became the largest opposition party in Parliament. Together with the PNL and the PC it formed a large political alliance USL (with parliamentary majority) that could in a first phase overthrow the minority government led by PDL and in a second phase win the parliamentary election scheduled for the end of 2012. This alliance formed of left, center right and right wing parties had a catch-all strategy and discourse aiming to mobilize different segments of the electorate. Consequently, it was not surprising that in the 2012 legislative election the alliance received approximately 60% of the votes and almost 70% of the seats in both Chambers of Parliament. Before that, the alliance succeeded in casting two parliamentary votes of no confidence against two consecutive PDL governments. After these failures of the PDL to form the government, the country President had to appoint one of the USL presidents as Prime-minister. In less than two months after this decision, the USL leaders initiated an impeachment procedure against the President¹⁴. Although voted in Parliament and by a large majority of those who participated in referendum, the suspension could not be validated due to the failure to reach the 50% participation threshold, i.e. the turnout was slightly above 46%.

The domination of the political life by the USL came to an end in the beginning of 2014 when, after conflicts with the PSD, the PNL exited the alliance and entered opposition. The remaining parties competed on joint lists

¹⁴ For details, see Sergiu Gherghina, Sergiu Mișcoiu, “The Failure of Cohabitation: Explaining the 2007 and 2012 Institutional Crises in Romania”, *East European Politics & Societies*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2013, pp. 668-684.

for the 2014 European election under a common label – the names of the three parties: PSD, UNPR and PC. The third party was the National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR) that joined the USL after the local elections in 2012. This party was formed in 2010 by a group of independent members of parliament (MP) who left the PSD and the PNL to support the country president and the PDL government. As a mixture of people originating in the two parties occupying different positions on the left-right axis, the UNPR lacks a clear ideology. However, the party claims to be center left because, part of the process of joining the USL, it formed with the PSD the Center Left Alliance. In this sense, the former PSD MPs are in a political alliance with their former party while few PNL MPs have found their place in a center left party.

While the UNPR it was the only party with intra-parliamentary origins, it was not the only one formed in this period of time. In the summer of 2012, after the failure to pass a vote of no confidence, the former Prime-minister of a government supported by the PDL, Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu formed a political party called the Civic Force (FC). With a declared center right ideology the party ran alone only in the 2014 European election. In 2012 it joined an electoral alliance with the PDL and the PNȚCD called the Right Romania Alliance (ARD). The poor electoral results did not ensure a long life to this alliance and disintegrated several months after. Another center-right political party formed in this period was the PMP, a splinter from the PDL. Following the loss of the internal election in the PDL, the faction supported by the country president left the party in 2013 and formed the PMP as political party in January 2014. In its short existence the PMP ran in the 2014 European election and secured two seats in the EP.

After five years of dynamic on the political scene the result is a solid and unitary political entity on the left side (PSD and the alliance around it) and many political parties sharing the right side of the political space. This fragmentation fueled discourses about the possibility and necessity of a unified “right” in Romanian politics. New political or electoral alliances between the political parties were envisaged. For example, the FC and the PMP, the newly emerged parties presented above, thought about merging or forming an alliance for the European election. None of the two happened and the FC failed to get parliamentary representation. Moreover, after the European election the PNL and the PDL agreed to form an electoral alliance for the presidential competition at the end of this year: the Christian Liberal Alliance (ACL). The two parties were in a political alliance in 2004 when they got second in the legislative election, but the project ended as soon as the PDL (at that time the PD) left the coalition government.

More important for this article, such evolutions led to a discursive separation between the left and the right in the last couple of years. This separation has been augmented both by politicians and journalists from press

and television. In their attempt to differentiate from competitors, politicians often referred to themselves as belonging to the right or to the left, while their opponents were portrayed as the representatives of the other side. Journalists used a similar approach for two reasons: 1) many private media outlets have partisan preferences and the portrayal of parties is biased and 2) the left-right division is easy to understand by the public and arguably appealing. The consequence was a type of discourse “left vs. right” in which political competitors have to clearly express the allegiance to one of the sides. Even more, the public discourse of political parties to the right illustrated a general tendency of differentiation from the left social democrats. While this strategy could be beneficial for the parties in terms of vote appeal, it could also represent a source of pressure for their own candidates. Those who ran for office had to consider their position along these lines and such a situation was likely to be reflected in ideological disagreement. For example, candidates could consider themselves more moderate or more radical than the party they represent. This article tests to what extent this is the case in the 2014 European election and what factors may be associated with it. The following section briefly presents the research design of this study.

DATA, VARIABLES AND METHODOLOGY

A total number of 572 candidates belonging to 15 political parties competed for the 32 available seats in the EP. The independent candidates are not counted because their self-placement on the left right axis is not relevant in the context of this analysis. Out of these, 274 candidates received an e-mail with the link to a web survey questionnaire. The survey did not reach every candidate because their e-mail addresses were not available. In spite of this shortcoming, there was no systematic bias in the number of invitations sent per party: no party received considerably fewer invitations for its candidates than others. Also, the availability of addresses did not vary according to the position occupied on the list. Since the survey was designed to focus on the attitudes and opinions of candidates during the electoral campaign, the data collection took place between 29 April and 20 May. It started several days after the official beginning of campaign and ended several days before the elections. A number of 68 candidates from 14 political parties replied (a response rate of almost 25% from the number of invitations sent). In general, the distribution of respondents was balanced in terms of age, parties that gained seats in the EP, and list

position¹⁵. The questions regarding self-placement and positioning of their own party (see below) were answered by 56 candidates, belonging to 12 political parties, distributed as follows: New Republic Party (PNR) (11), FC (9), Socialist Alternative Party (PAS) (7), PSD (5), PMP (5), PNL (4), UDMR (4), Green Party (PV) (3), PDL (2), Party of Social Justice (PDS) (2), PNȚCD (2), and PPDD (2). The survey sample is not random probabilistic and the results presented in the following section are not representative. Their applicability is limited to survey respondents but it is useful in observing some trends.

The two key variables for this analysis are related to the subjective placement of the candidates on the left-right axis. The first is a self-placement measure and was the answer to the following question: “In politics people discuss often about left and right. On a 1 (left) to 10 (right) scale, where would you position yourself on such a scale?”. The second variable asked candidates to position their party on the same left-right scale. The questions were asked successively, in this order. The difference between the score chosen for the first question and the score for the second question gives the level of disagreement between self-placement and the position of the party. For example, a candidate who considers that she is 7 on the left right scale and her party is also a 7 will have a score 0 for disagreement; this means that there is ideological agreement between the candidate and party. A candidate who gives a score of 7 to the first question and a score of 6 to the second will have an ideological disagreement score equal to +1. This means that the candidate is positioned slightly to the right than the party. Conversely, if a candidate gives a score of 7 to the first question and one of 9 to the second, the disagreement score will be -2, i.e. the candidate is more to the left than the party. While these issues are relevant for the general descriptions, the analysis uses a recoded version. In this sense, the extent of disagreement does not account for deviations to the left or to the right. This is the reason for which similar deviations are merged. For example, if one candidate has a score of -2 and another has a score of +2, they belong to the same category – disagreement of two units relative to their parties.

As explained in the introduction, the analysis will check whether several variables are associated with the levels of disagreement: party affiliation, age of the candidates, position on the list, and experience in the party. The party affiliation is a dichotomous variable that differentiates between parties to the left and parties to the right. While I agree that this is a quite simplistic approach for a series of reasons (e.g. it ignores differences between moderate and radical actors on the same side of the political space), it helps observing some patterns among the competitors. Parties on the left are considered PAS, PDS, and PSD

¹⁵ Details about the candidate survey are available in Sergiu Gherghina, “What Comes Next? A Candidate Perspective on the EP Policy Priorities until 2019”, *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2014: forthcoming.

(this includes UNPR and PC), while the parties on the right are FC, PDL, PMP, PNL, PNR, and PNȚCD. The coding used objective indicators such as the manifestos used by political parties in previous elections or political programs from their websites. Three other parties were not coded on the left right axis due to their populist rhetoric (PPDD), specific appeal towards an ethnic group (UDMR) and single-issue orientation (PV). The age of candidates is measured as number of years until the moment of European election on 25 May 2014. The position is as straightforward as the name indicates, being an ordinal measure corresponding to the position of the candidate on the list of her party. Data for age and list position are taken from the publicly available lists of candidates. Finally, experience in the party is measured as the answer to the question: "Have you been a candidate for this party before?". Multiple answers were possible and the available options were: "yes, in national parliamentary elections", "yes, in European elections", "yes, in local elections" and "no". Based on the provided answers I created an additive index with values ranging from 0 (no previous candidacy) to 3 (candidate in all three types of elections).

The methods used for analysis are limited to descriptive statistics in the form of cross-tabulations or correlations (depending on the type of variables). The following section includes the findings and starts with a general description of the levels of ideological disagreement.

IDEOLOGICAL DISAGREEMENT AND ITS VARIATIONS

Figure 1 depicts the candidate self-placement and their perception about party positioning on the left-right axis. The a) distribution indicates a tendency of the Romanian candidates to position themselves in the right side of the political space. It is somewhat surprising to observe that 20 candidates see themselves as being positioned at the end of the continuum (value 10 on the scale). Since not many of these respondents belong to the radical right parties, such a distribution is likely to be partly determined by a wrong interpretation of what the scale is about. Instead of considering 10 as an extreme value, the candidates probably saw this as the ideal match of a right wing ideology. Another possible explanation for the tendency to choose the maximum value on the axis can be empirically linked with the direction of political discourses before the electoral campaign. The desire to distinguish themselves from left wing parties could have driven candidates in adopting extreme positions. It is relevant to note that things are different with candidates who chose value 1 on the axis. It is less surprising to see this decision in the context of many

candidates belonging to the left-wing PAS or the PDS; the political programs of each party position them quite close to that area.

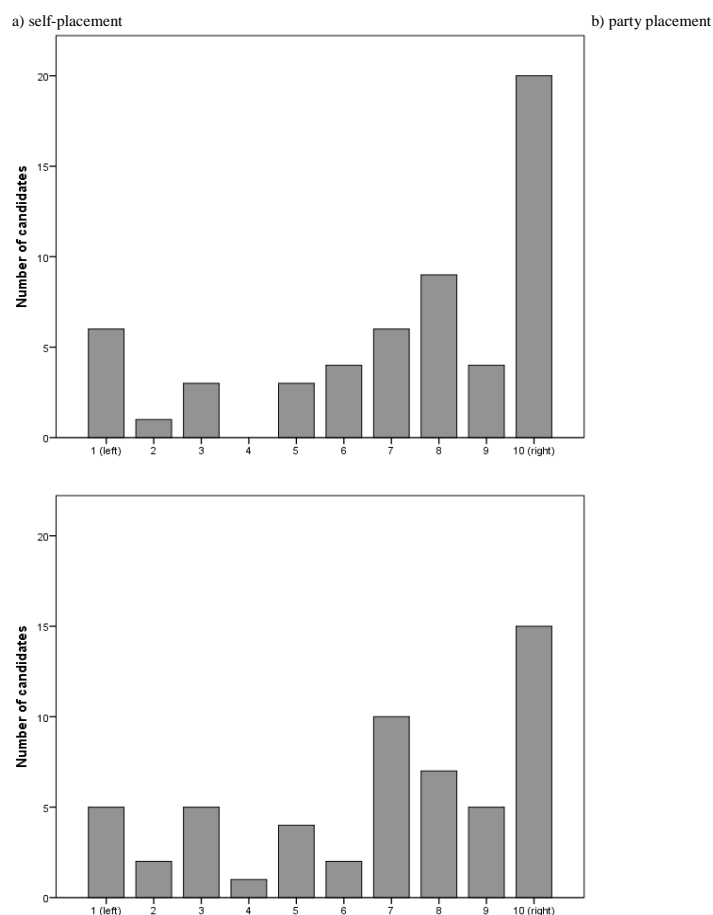


Figure 1. Candidate Self-Placement and Subjective Party Positioning on the Left-Right Axis

In comparison, the b) distribution depicts the perceived positioning of the parties to which the candidates belong. One of the differences that can be immediately observed is that fewer candidates position their parties at the highest value on the axis; to much less extent this is true also for the lowest value (1). Another difference is that value 4 (center-left) has a correspondent. At the same time, there is a visible change between the values 7 and 8 between the two sides of the graph. Overall, these bar charts indicate the existence of ideological differences that drive the analysis in this section.

How much disagreement is there between the self-placement of candidates and the subjective positioning of their parties? According to the level and direction of disagreement presented in Figure 2, 64% (the horizontal axis includes percentages) of the candidates answered identically when asked about their position and that of their party on the left right-scale. The rest of 36% (slightly more than one third of the candidates) displayed various degrees of disagreement. Out of these 9% were positioned to the left than their parties, while three times more positioned themselves more to the right than their parties. In this category, most respondents indicated a disagreement of one or two positions but there were also cases where disagreement as high as three or five positions. These differences are reflected in the figure that has on the horizontal axis the level of disagreement; minus scores means positioning to the left of the candidate. In light of this evidence we can conclude that one out of three candidates has ideological disagreement with her party. Quite often this takes the form of a positioning to the right of the candidate relative to the party.

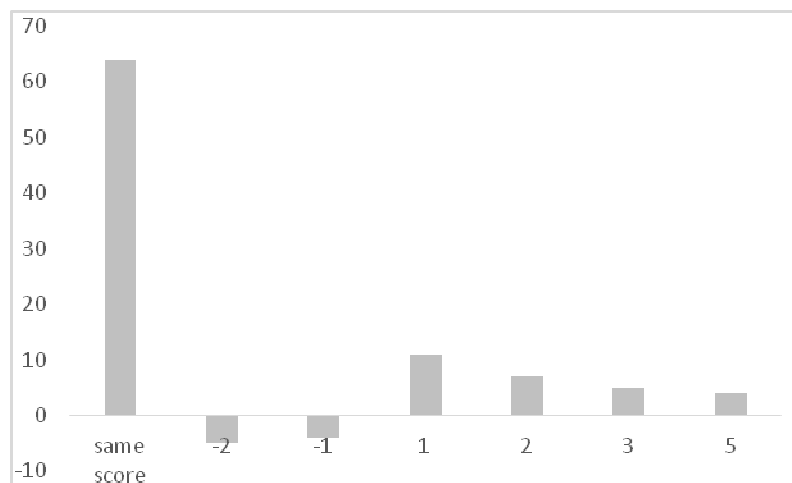


Figure 2. The Disagreement Score between Candidate and Party Positioning

As previously explained, the analysis presented in this section recodes the values presented in Figure 2. It merges similar scores with different sign (e.g. -2 and 2) into a common category. The variation of disagreement is the following: score of 1 (15%), score of 2 (12%), score of 3 (5%) and score of 5 (4%). Table 1 presents the distribution of these levels of disagreement according to candidate belonging to a left or to a right political party. The removal of three parties decreased the number of candidates to 47 out of whom 33 are from parties to the right. The difference is not surprising given that the coding presented in the previous section took into account twice as many parties to the

right than those from the left side of the political space. The percentages in Table 1 – calculated within the party type - indicate the general absence of differences between candidates to the left and to the right when disagreeing with their parties. In other words, they disagree to fairly similar extents irrespective of their positioning in the political space. Approximately two thirds of candidates agree with their parties, while minimum to moderate disagreement (scores of 1 and 2) can be observed for 22 and 24% of the candidates in any of the two types (left or right). A small difference appears if we look at the direction of disagreement (the one reflected in Figure 2). Percentages that are not reported here indicate that in case of small disagreements candidates from parties to the left tend to position themselves more to the left than their political parties, while candidates belonging to parties of the right see themselves more to the right. These centrifugal tendencies on both sides of the center – in the one-dimensional space assumed here – confirm the discussion from the section on political developments in Romania. The dichotomy from the political discourse could represent a source of pressure that pushes candidates to perceive themselves more radical than their parties. The absence of a real difference between the candidates is also illustrated by the low value of the association coefficient (somer's d , -0.05).

Table 1

The Level of Disagreement according to Party Affiliation (Left-Right)

| | Left (%) | Right (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Same score | 64 | 67 |
| 1 | 8 | 12 |
| 2 | 14 | 12 |
| 3 | 0 | 9 |
| 5 | 14 | 0 |

Table 2 includes the Spearman correlation coefficients between ideological agreement and age, position on the list, and party experience of candidates. To begin with age, the negative value of the coefficient (-0.28, significant at 0.05) indicates a moderate tendency of younger candidates to be in disagreement with their parties. This finding is not surprising given that older candidates are usually more socialized and accustomed with how the party works and what it stands for. There is a positive correlation (not reported in this article) between the age of candidates and length of activity in their party. At the same time, young people who get involved in politics are oriented towards changes and are sometimes more radical than the party. This element is in line with the trends illustrated in Figure 2.

The position on the list does not appear to make much of a difference. The low value of the correlation coefficient (0.07) indicates a weak relationship in the sense that candidates occupying lower positions on the list are slightly

more likely to disagree with party ideology than the others. This piece of evidence is also quite intuitive since usually top positions on the list are occupied by party elites who have often played an active role in defining party ideology. Lower positions are sometimes offered to newcomers to illustrate the openness of the party and to encourage them to continue their activity for the party. Consequently, it is likely to have a higher ideological diversity towards the end of the list.

Table 2

Correlations between Level of Disagreement and Age, Position on the List, and Party Experience of Candidates

| | Correlation coefficient |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Candidate age | -0.28* |
| Position on the List | 0.07 |
| Experience in the party | 0.10 |
| N | 56 |

* $p < 0.05$

Experience in the party is also weakly correlated with the level of disagreement (0.1). According to the positive coefficient it means that candidates who ran in elections for their current party disagree more with their party than the other candidates. At a glance, the results appear counter-intuitive since one would expect such candidates with experience in the party to share its ideology. The other side of the coin, and a possible explanation for this empirical observation, is that previous electoral competitions have helped candidates understanding the differences between them and the party. In this sense, experience plays the role of raising awareness about own ideological position separated from that of the party.

CONCLUSIONS

This article analyzed the ideological agreement between subjective positioning of Romanian candidates and political parties on the left-right axis in the most recent European election. The exploratory study showed the existence of ideological disagreement and tested the extent to which some variables were associated with this disagreement. The empirical evidence revealed that one third of the Romanian candidates who answered the survey conducted in April-May 2014 have a different ideological position than that of their party. Usually, candidates see themselves as positioned more to the right of the political space as the parties they come from. This trend can be linked to the public discourse about left and right divisions in Romanian politics over the last five years.

Many politicians and journalists sought to depict the political space through the lenses of a polarized competition. This type of discourse can be one potential explanation for the existence of ideological disagreement.

Age of the candidate correlates the highest with different attitudes and show that the younger the candidates are the more they defect from party ideology. Meanwhile, the objective positioning of the party (left vs. right), candidate position on the list for European election and experience in the party (previous candidacies) correlate weakly with the level of disagreement. While the choice of variables is not guided by a solid theoretical reason, it is relevant to note that none of the factors directly related to politics such as experience in the party or position on the list correlate highly with ideological disagreement. This intriguing conclusion opens the floor for further research in this direction. On the one hand, it is likely to have other political features of the candidates such as position in the party, length of activity in the party, or intensity of activity as good correlates of agreement. All these should be further explored in a separate piece of research. On the other hand, age may be a proxy for political attitudes such as willingness to change something in the party or attitudes towards a different vision of politics. To fully grasp its meaning, future studies have to closely investigate the existence of such relationships.

The key finding of this study is the existence of ideological disagreement between candidates and their parties. In spite of its inherent limitations, this study can be a useful point of departure for further analysis. One way to proceed is to provide explanations of such disagreements. Although the use of causal statistical models for 56 candidates can be highly problematic, there is room for maneuver with respect to qualitative insights. In this respect, one may use either qualitative follow-up interviews with candidates or other items from the candidate survey presented in this article. Another avenue for further research is the understanding of what Romanian candidates mean by left and right. This may also clarify why so many positioned quite far from the center of the political space although that is usually the place where many voters are located.